

Nevada Strategic Planning for Statewide Interoperability

Focus Group 6

**Ely, NV
July 14, 2005
Follow Up Report**



Executive Summary

The Ely focus group session on July 14, 2005 provided valuable input from the state and local practitioner perspective for the development of the Statewide Communications Interoperability Strategic Plan. The focus group participants identified the following top three major initiatives to be considered during the upcoming strategic planning session in Las Vegas, Nevada on September 14, 2005:

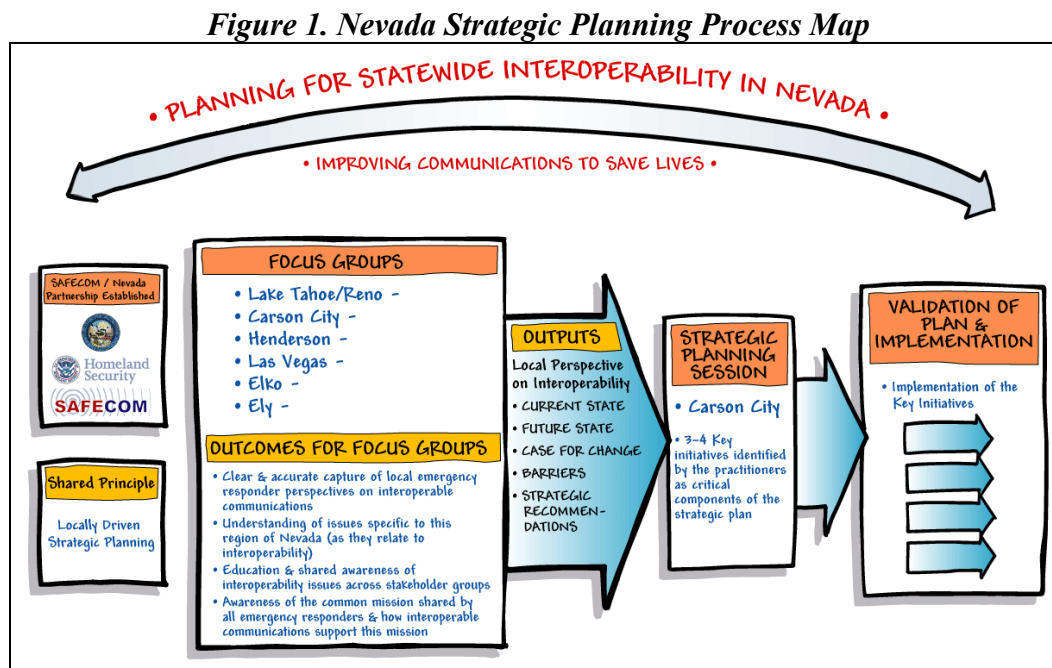
- (1) Identify one statewide interoperable architecture that will work for everybody
- (2) Educate by creating executive summaries for selling the scope of priorities and needs including a cost-benefit analysis to elected official, policy makers, and buyers
- (3) Establish an empowered group with broad representation from the regions that can make decisions and achieve consensus so that everybody can live with the decisions

Introduction

The State of Nevada has established a partnership with the SAFECOM Program to conduct a pilot project that will lead to the development of a communications interoperability strategic plan that includes the input of public safety practitioners. SAFECOM's mission is to serve as the umbrella program within the federal government to help local, state, tribal and federal public safety agencies improve public safety response through more effective and efficient interoperable wireless communications. The involvement of local and statewide emergency responders is essential to the success of developing a Statewide Interoperability Strategic Plan. The Nevada Communications Steering Committee (NCSC) serves as the primary point of contact for these efforts.*

In order to develop a collaborative Statewide Communications Interoperability Strategic Plan, the State has asked SAFECOM to conduct six (6) regional focus group sessions, comprised mainly of informal and formal leaders from fire, law enforcement, and Emergency Medical Services (EMS) departments. Additional representation includes public health, local and state agencies in order to accurately capture local perspectives on the state of interoperable communications in Nevada. In addition to the 6 focus group sessions, a strategic planning session will also be conducted to validate and build on the inputs from the focus groups.

The following graphic depicts the process by which SAFECOM will bring locally driven philosophy and strategic planning approach to the regional focus groups and strategic planning session.



* The members of the Nevada Communications Steering Committee (NCSC) who participated in this focus group did so in their practitioner or individual agency role. They did not participate as members of the NCSC. No NCSC deliberations were undertaken, nor decisions made.

The outcomes of the focus group sessions are as follows:

- ☐ Clear and accurate capture of local emergency responder perspectives on interoperable communications
- ☐ Understanding of issues specific to this region of Nevada (as they relate to interoperability)
- ☐ Education and shared awareness of interoperability issues across stakeholder groups
- ☐ Awareness of the common mission shared by all emergency responders, saving lives, and how interoperable communications support this mission

Each focus group session is designed as a series of conversations centered on the following issues: interoperability (statewide and regional) as it relates to the current state, the envisioned future state, case for why change needs to happen, barriers to achieving the future state, and recommended strategies to pursue.

Detailed Overview

Current State

The objective of the Current State conversation is to affirm the facts about current interoperability capabilities and needs in Nevada regarding response efforts spanning day-to-day operations up through catastrophic events.

The Ely focus group identified the following Current State themes specific to communications interoperability in Nevada:

- Interagency interoperability among state and local first responders (law enforcement, fire, and EMS) does not exist
 - Local and state law enforcement can't always talk to each other
 - Local emergency services and fire departments can't always talk to Nevada Highway Patrol (NHP)
 - NHP can't always talk to their own dispatchers due to dead spots in certain areas
 - NHP from the northern area cannot always talk to Las Vegas NHP
 - For example, not all troopers from Reno and Las Vegas have the VHF frequencies programmed on their radios so they could not communicate with other troopers in the rural areas
 - Radio communications with NHP were better when it was on low-band VHF
- Radios have dead spots due to inadequate equipment and Nevada's terrain
- The region lacks a mutual aid channel that works
 - NHP has to carry an 800 MHz radio and a high band radio to talk to the rural communities (if programmed in the radio)
 - There is no possibility for having a mutual radio because of the infrastructure, lack of radio compatibility, and expense
- There are no short-term or long-term processes for funding communications

- One county receives less than \$70K for an entire county for all homeland security issues
- Funding limitations hinder buying equipment
- There is no funding to set up standardized communications protocols and training
- The region does not have a designated “on the scene” (tactical operations) frequency for an incident
 - Currently using routine frequencies for incidents
 - There is no connection with the statewide mutual aid radio system
- Lack of communications processes and protocols
 - Lack of standard training on communications protocols and equipment
 - No consolidated language
 - Ely region is not currently using clear text and have two different 10-codes
 - Clark County is using 400 code
 - Nye County using plain language
- Technology is changing and no one can agree on a standard to spend the limited funding on
- The region does not collaborate across agencies to leverage their collective buying power
 - Politics, trust, and accountability influence the decisions of the buyers to fund the projects
 - Local practitioners do not have the technical expertise in-house to beware of vendors and to buy the right systems
 - Many agencies have invested into proprietary systems and are forced to continue buying their products over time
- Local county commissioners and buyers do not adequately understand interoperability to make purchasing decisions
 - Vendors will target representatives who are not informed about communications
- The 800 MHz system does not work for communicating with rural fire agencies
 - Technology, terrain and geography get in the way
- There is no plan for fire or Bureau of Land Management (BLM) to buy 800 radio system



Future State

The objective of the Future State conversation is to describe the desired future regarding communications among emergency responders in Nevada.

The Ely focus group highlighted the following elements of the Future State of communications interoperability in Nevada:

- Any practitioner can pick up the radio, key the mic, and talk to whomever they want when needed
- The region has a pyramid organizational structure with one lead advocate supported by a base of leaders
- The leaders and practitioners in the region have mastered how to get federal and state funding
- Standard and compatible radios are available to all first responders
 - Equipment is user friendly, powerful, durable, reliable, and easy to operate/maintain
- One system exists with 100% coverage that can send voice and data with spectrum efficiency
- The region has a redundant ground communications system, standardized training, and uniformed operations
- Local systems are always tested and evaluated prior to deployment and use only upgradeable equipment, not expensive forklift replacements
- Every agency has its own tactical channels
- The region has a redundant, networked interagency, cross-county, or regional dispatch system where each dispatch center can back up the others

Case for Change

The objective of the Case for Change conversation is to discuss the consequences and implications if changes to Nevada's state of interoperable communications do not occur, in addition to the opportunities that may be missed by not changing. The Case for Change statements should appeal to the emotions of individuals and result in action.

The Ely focus group identified the following elements as part of making a Case for Change:

- The region's current communications system does not work
- The safety and welfare of the public and first responders is jeopardized without effective communications, especially as incidents become more severe
- The public safety community is continually putting band-aids on systems that do not work right and run the risk of slower response times
- The local first responder community has established common goals and recommends building a new system that will be upgradeable, allowing practitioners to maintain the system longer for less money over time
- Current operations waste money and provide no progress

- Improving interoperability will:
 - Improve response time and capabilities so that first responders can arrive on scene and do their jobs efficiently
 - Provide more up time and less down time
 - Lower the risk of liability lawsuits
 - Eliminate the fragmentation of consultants and systems to save money
 - Save money by leveraging economies of scale
 - Increase morale and retain volunteers and first responders by providing them with equipment that works and will keep them safe

Barriers

The purpose of the Barriers conversation is to identify factors hindering the effort to achieve the Future State.

The Ely participants identified the following barriers:



- Lack the expertise on where to get the money that is out there
- People will not want to replace their own systems
- Fear of new systems not working the right way or as needed
- There is a lack of confidence in the state's direction among the counties
- One county can derail an entire agreement
- It is hard to justify scrapping existing systems for the betterment of the whole
- First responders are not empowered to write their own RFPs and basically they are responding to vendor requirements instead of vice-versa
- Committed to incompatible systems and no one is saying what the right system is
- First responders are responding to vendor requirements
- People who can approve the funding have other priorities

Strategic Recommendations

The purpose of the Strategic Recommendations conversation is to identify the fundamental strategic initiatives essential to reach the desired future state, including the completion of the statewide plan and identification of the most important initiatives the state can undertake in the short term.

The Ely focus group participants identified the following top three (3) critical initiatives to achieve communications interoperability statewide:

- (1) Identify one statewide interoperable architecture that will work for everybody
- (2) Educate by creating executive summaries for selling the scope of priorities and needs including a cost-benefit analysis to elected official, policy makers, and buyers

- (3) Establish an empowered group with broad representation from the regions that can make decisions and achieve consensus so that everybody can live with the decisions

Next Steps

The outcomes from the 6 regional focus group sessions will drive the upcoming strategic planning session. The key initiatives identified by practitioners across the state will serve as the documented view of the user community detailing their perspective on efforts that will most improve interoperable communications in the State of Nevada. The strategic planning session is scheduled to take place in Las Vegas, Nevada on September 14, 2005.

The SAFECOM/Nevada Partnership is committed to maintaining communications with the participants of each focus group as the planning for statewide interoperability in Nevada progresses. This report details the results of the Ely focus group meeting and was distributed to the participants on Friday, July 22, 2005 (a list of focus group participants is included as Appendix A). In addition, the results of the conversations with all 6 focus groups will be made available to all participants in late July.

Immediate actions participants committed to based on their participation in the focus group include:

- Participants interested in participating in Humboldt County's offer to build a web page that contains frequencies will contact Brian Jonas - 775-623-6419 or Paul Burkholder at hccd paul@sbcglobal.net
- Participants will investigate the possibility of pooling resources for getting a technical specialist for this region

Appendix A

Participants in the July 14, 2005 focus group meeting, in Nevada's Ely Area on Nevada's Strategic Planning for Statewide Communications Interoperability:

First Name	Last Name	Division/Department	Phone	Email
Joni	Eastley	Nye County Commissioner	775-482-8191	castle@lnett.com
John	Evans	Cherry Creek Fire Chief	775-591-0405	
Mike	Francone	White Pine County Sheriff	775-284-8808	undersheriff@mwpower.net
Laine	Hendrix	White Pine County Fire District Battalion Chief	775-289-1627 775-296-0418	onthebus@mwpower.net
Hal	Hughes	NHP, Ely	775-289-1600	hhughes@dps.state.nv.us
Jeff	Knudtson	Fire Chief	775-664-2274	jknudtson@westwendovercity.com
Tom	Merschel	NHP Central Command	775-753-1176	tmerschel@dps.state.nv.us
Russell	Peacock	LEPC, White Pine County	775-289-8406	wpcoem@mwpower.net
Ross	Rivera	Ely Fire Department	775-289-6633	elyvfd@mwpower.net
Mike	Simon	White Pine County – Nuclear Waste Division	775-289-2033	wpnucwstl@mwpower.net
Patrick	Simon	White Pine County – EMS Coordinator	775-289-2208	
Jim	Wilson	Clark County, SNACC Program Manager	702-455-7390 702-379-1917	jimwi@co.clark.nv.us

Appendix B

Graphical Representation of the Nevada Strategic Planning Process

